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Lesson 3: The Philosophy of Signs and Evil

From the earliest times to the present, a group of the unaware went against God's Justice and expressed ideas that either God's Justice did not exist or even sometimes they not only negated justice but used it as a means of proving the nonexistence of God like unexpected catastrophes such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural calamities, and differences of these types which can be found among people and also calamities and evil which extend to human beings or plants and animals.

1. Relative Judgment and Limited Knowledge

Normally, all of us, in our judgments and determination of confirmations, stress the relation things have with us. For instance, we say, such and such is near us or far from us in other words, in relation to us.

Or such and such a person is strong or weak, that is, in comparison to our physical ability or spiritual situation. In issues relating to good and evil and calamities and natural catastrophes, people's judgment is usually the same.

For instance, if rain falls in a region, we have nothing to do with what the total effects of the rain were. We only think about our own environment, home or pasture areas, or, at the most, our own city. If it was a positive event, we say that it was God's Blessing and if negative, we call it a negative event.

When they destroy a building in order to build a new one, and we only share in its dust, we say that it was a bad event even if in the future a hospital will be built there which everyone can make use of and even if the rain had positive effects in other parts of the city.

In our normal judgments, we consider a snake bite to be a calamity without recognizing the fact that this very bite and poison is an effective means of defense for this animal and disregarding the fact that sometimes from this very poison, a life-giving medicine is produced which saves the lives of thousands of people.

Thus, if we do not want to be misled, we must look at our own limitations and in our judgments, not only

look at things in relation to ourselves but rather consider all sides of the issue and judge from all points of view.

In principle, events in the world are all linked together like a chain. The hurricane which hits our city today and a heavy downpour of rain which brings floods is one of these long links which is completely related to other links and is related also with an event which took place in the past and will take place in the future.

The conclusion or result is that putting one's finger on only a small part of an issue and judging it accordingly is not to have used one's intellect and logic.

That which is worthy of creation (that which creation deserves) is complete goodness but if something, from one point of view, is evil, goodness prevails. A surgical operation is discomfoting, from one point of view, and, from another, beneficial. Thus, goodness is relative.

For further development and discussion, let us look at the occurrence of an earthquake. It is true that in one area, destruction occurs but if we consider its relation to other issues, we can change our opinion.

Does an earthquake relate to the temperatures and pressure within the earth or does it relate to the attractions of the moon which continuously draws the earth towards itself and it sometimes breaks or does it relate to both? Scientists have differing views.

But whatever of these exist, the effects upon another thing must be considered. That is, we must know what effect the temperature; inside the earth has in creating oil resources, which is the most important energy material in our age and also the creation of coal, etc. Thus, goodness is relative.

And also what effect the ebb and flow of the tides stemming from the pull of the moon on the oceans has upon life within the water and its creatures and often, watering a dry coast line in places where sweet water meets the oceans. This is also a relative good.

It is here that we understand what relative judgments and limited information we have when we look at issues like this as dark points which the attractions of the created world contains and however much more we look at the relationship between phenomena, we become more aware of its importance.

The Holy Quran tells us,

الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

“Of knowledge, it is only a little that is communicated to you.” (17:85)

2. Undesirable events and warnings

We have all seen people who when drowned in blessings, fall under influence of pride and selfishness and in this state or condition, many of the important issues and duties are forgotten.

And, also, we have all seen that at the time of the calmness of the oceans of life and complete restfulness, how such a state of sleep and forgetfulness is given a person, which, if it continues, will bring great misfortune to that person.

Without doubt, some of the undesirable events of life are in order to end that state of pride and to do away with this sleep and forgetfulness of life.

You have most certainly heard that experienced drivers complain about roads which are flat, level and lacking any twists or turns, ups or downs and they describe these attractive qualities as dangerous ones. Why? Because the monotony of this road causes a driver to fall asleep and it is here that danger comes to him.

It has even been seen that some countries have created artificial ups and downs and put holes to prevent such a danger.

The path or way of life of a human being, is also the same. If life does not have any ups or downs or potholes, and if undesirable events never occur, a state of forgetfulness of God and sleep will come and prevent a person from undertaking his or her duties and responsibilities.

We are not intimating that a human being must create undesirable events for himself or herself or welcome misfortune because calamities have continuously been and will continue to be. Rather, we say that one must be attentive to a part of this philosophy which is to prevent pride and forgetfulness because these are enemies and barriers to wellbeing and happiness. We repeat, this is the philosophy of a part of these undesirable events, not all of them because they have other aspects, as well, which, with the Will of God, will be mentioned in further lessons.

The Holy Quran tells us,

فَلَوْلَا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا تَضَرَّعُوا وَلَكِنْ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

"When the suffering reached them from Us, why then did they not learn humility?"(6:43)

Think and Answer

1. What people have mentioned the issue of calamities and catastrophes in their ideology?

2. Mention some calamities and catastrophes. In your own life, have you ever met up with them?
3. What is meant by relative judging and total judgment and absolute evil and relative good?
4. Are earthquakes and hurricanes only harmful?
5. What positive effects can undesirable events have upon one's psyche?

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